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DEVELOPMENTS IN AMERICAN SILVERSMITHING

By W. FRANK PURDY

PROBABLY one of the most encouraging phases of the development of taste and the desire for good art in this country, at the present time, is the almost universal demand for it as applied to the practical furnishing and appointments of our homes, a tendency particularly noticeable, perhaps, in the dining-room equipment, and table silver. Equally encouraging is the manner in which the American silversmith has trained himself to meet the demand in this direction.

Granting the exception of the work of that little group of early Colonial craftsmen, whose handwrought bits of purest beauty have been so carefully treasured, it was for many years, an axiom among people of cultivated taste in this country that for perfection of design and craftsmanship in household silver, it was essential to seek the silversmiths of England and France, who alone could adequately satisfy a discriminating taste. It is an undoubted fact, at least, that during that lamentable period which immediately succeeded our Civil War, the factory or so-called practical influence in our silversmithing shops greatly predominated over—indeed quite overruled—the artistic and authentic in the creation of their products. At that time, it was the skill of the more or less well-trained mechanic, who, having in mind the subsequent uses of the elements employed in the production of his work—such as the conversion of the bobèche of a candlestick into an individual butter-plate, or vice versa, or the body of that same candlestick into a pepper-shaker—which controlled the development of these products. American silver was valued for the money it cost, and possibly its use, rather than for sincerity and beauty of design.

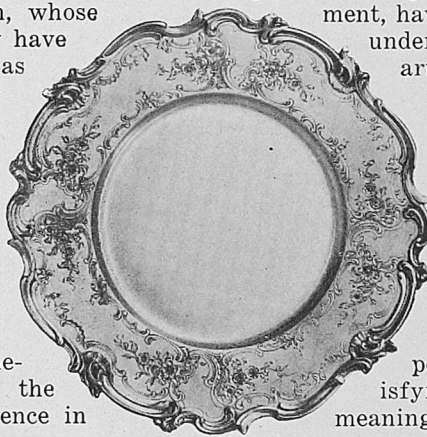
To-day, all this is changed. It is now the atelier or designing-room, peopled with the graduates of our art and technical schools, whose knowledge of pure form and true beauty have cleansed the factory of its discordant medley, which controls the creation of every great and small detail of the silversmith's wares, and it is to this better influence that the practical man, in all the various departments of the shop, must yield. The modern designing-room is, in fact, frequently under the direct supervision of a trained officer of the company—a man who himself through travel, observation, and study is a recognized authority on matters of art, architecture, and period design. It has furthermore grown to be the custom of many of the most successful organizations to send their subordinate

designers abroad, at the company's expense, to study the best handiwork of the old masters of their craft, as well as to absorb the best that the modern schools afford. All this has been productive of results which have been so gradual in development, however, that most of our people have remained unaware of the strength and beauty in practical home appointments which have grown up in our midst.

The tea-service shown in the illustration is a conspicuous example of this new influence and development, having been created at the request and under the discriminating criticism of an artistically trained and ambitious dealer in one of our middle-western cities. No finer nor more complete example of Italian Renaissance could well be imagined. Conceived in the light of an exact knowledge of the period, cunningly wrought with that loving devotion to sound craftsmanship without which perfect results in so fine an art are impossible, it is most complete and satisfying. Contrasted with much of that meaningless "assembled" work of the early sixties in this "business"—for a business it was then, instead of the art which it has since become—each carefully studied and cleverly wrought foot, handle, and spout, each scroll, shield, and terminal is a sincere and harmonious expression of true art, faithful in every line and detail to the period which inspired it.

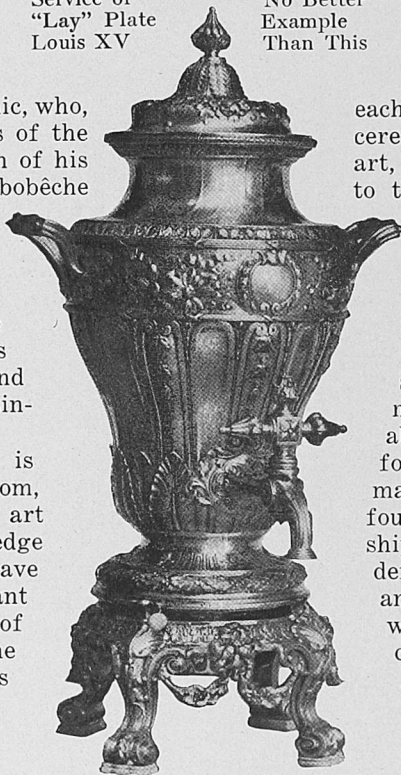
It would well repay, to-day, one genuinely interested in the development of good taste in the fine and applied arts in this country to visit a few—indeed a great many—of the prominent shops in all our larger cities, and note for himself the almost entire absence of the "baroque" influence of former days. Not one piece, but many—a majority in fact—will be found of purest design and craftsmanship, executed with a loving and patient deference to the highest ideals of taste, and a fidelity to artistic tradition which will be as grateful and encouraging, as they are refreshing. Never again, let us hope, shall we be dependent upon Bond Street or the Rue de la Paix for individual and artistic examples of the silversmith's craft, for the appropriate adornment of our dining-room or tea-table. Many amateurs are

becoming professionals and women as well as men can be found in our big cities who bring the true zeal and zest of the artist to their work. The American silversmith has met his problem and is solving it.



Service or
"Lay" Plate
Louis XV

No Better
Example
Than This



Urn: Splendid Example of
Louis XVI